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Routing Sheet

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Walter-OK this appl 3 Oct 83

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D

Case Control No. 8102756

~~SECRET~~ OADR

Date signed

AUG 12 [illegible]

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Warren A. Trest
Chief, Histories Division
Office of Air Force History

FROM: John R. Burke
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Classification/Declassification
Center
Bureau of Administration

SUBJECT: Review of Draft Manuscript
"Interdiction in Sourthern Laos,
1960 - 1968"

In the course of review of the subject document, my colleagues and I have noted a number of instances in which material remains exempt from declassification (see attachment), under Paragraph (b)(1) of Section 552, as being currently and properly classified under E.O. 12356, and authorized to remain protected in the interest of national defense or foreign policy.

As you know, the United States maintains a diplomatic mission in Vientiane, headed by a charge d'affaires. The present Lao regime was on the receiving end for ordnance drops during the period covered by the manuscripts. It is not in the U.S. interest to release an official history of such activities in unclassified form at this stage in our relations.

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In accordance with your request we have also reviewed the manuscript for errors and inaccuracies. On the basis of our findings, as discussed below, we recommend that the full text be given a major reworking and that it remain fully classified.

The initial portion of the draft, especially the early period, (1954-1962) is muddled and confused. The key aspects of the 1962 agreements are not adequately presented. Events jump back and forth between Laos and Vietnam, and from year to year. Reference by the author to the recently published Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-1954 Volume XIII Pts 1 & 2 may help in clarifying the particular period. The early part of the manuscript should be thoroughly rewritten, even to be used as a classified version.

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While the southern aspect of the war in Laos appears difficult at times to distinguish from the conflict in Vietnam, which may have been desirable from MACV's point of view, an accurate historical account demands that the writer know and understand that the top leadership in Washington was required to view this aspect as conceptually distinct, but overlapping, with separate operations (in many areas). During the war it may have been difficult at times for the Air Force to perceive this subtlety. The manuscript mirrors it. While it may appear on the surface to be useful in portraying Air Force views of the conflict, the quality of the history suffers. In some cases the balance is there, but usually not.

Aside from specific instances where information is still protected by classification, accounts of individual operations that reflect military operational messages as well as Department of State traffic appear to be accurate and solidly based. In the light of the new Executive Order, (E.O. 12356) the practice followed in this work of drawing information from Department of State telegrams which may still be classified, subject to upgrading or extension would be dropped. Such documents should first be submitted to this office for classification review and possible downgrading. In this way such review will become considerably more direct and rapid.

Security concerns arise from the treatment of former Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma in the manuscript. While the Communists have a pretty good book on Souvanna, drawn in part from Congressional hearings, publication of an official history of the period by the United States would provide details well beyond what has been released officially so far, showing how much he condoned the air war. This could ultimately jeopardize the safety and life of a statesman who for years helped the United States in its efforts, while getting something short of the help he would have needed to maintain the independence of Laos.

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The draft, while clearly projecting an Air Force view of events, does not do justice to what actually happened, even to those activities which fell within the scope of the Air Force's responsibilities. U.S. policy, which applied to all government activity, civil and military, was carried out under complex

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and difficult circumstances. The President (p. 77-78) is treated in a condescending manner for not fully endorsing commanders' views. "High Washington officials" are criticized for "interjecting themselves in other planning details normally left to the discretion of air commanders." Chiefs of Mission, particularly those in Laos, are treated with disdain for carrying out U.S. policy. Indeed, the execution of national policy and activities was difficult for all agencies concerned. It is therefore especially important that official histories of the period give balanced and understanding accounts of the problems, as well as the accomplishments. Our objections are not to the unflattering characterizations, although they are out of place, but to the basically narrow, biased approach which gave rise to these views.

We do believe there is a need for an adequately classified account of the air effort for the period under consideration. As we suggested above, for those portions and aspects of the history that go beyond the specifics of the air operations themselves, a thorough reworking of the history is required. Aside from the question of inaccuracies the account would benefit greatly from elimination of parochial overtones in discussions related to the role of the Embassy in Vientiane, and the leadership in Washington. Policy for this period was set at the highest levels, something that appears to have been overlooked in the manuscript that was sent to us.

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